



Aruba pays homage to Dr. Roberto Bryson for his twenty-eight years of service to the community.

Dr. Bryson is regarded with great affection and respect for his selfless and unflagging effort on behalf of the welfare of Aruba's children. In 1978, when he set up his practice at the Horacio E. Oduber hospital after attending University in Youngstown, Ohio, obtaining his medical degree in Brussels, and performing his internship and residency at the Brooklyn Hospital in New York, he was the only pediatrician on Aruba. The entire community honors his lifetime of work, and so the 1st Annual Dr. Roberto Bryson Symposium will take place this Saturday at the Cas di Cultura in Oranjestad. Doctors and health care specialists from Aruba, New York and Curacao will be discussing the troubling epidemic of child obesity and the resulting health problems it presents.

Dr. Roberto Bryson was forced to retire after suffering a serious stroke while attending a conference in Canada in May of 2005. He also suffered another about a little less than a year ago. He was planning to retire already, after spending twenty-eight years as a pediatrician, so he had begun arranging for the transfer of his patients before he was struck down, and it was not too much of a hardship in regards to his practice.

THE NEWS spoke with Dr. Bryson in his home, where he spends much of his day by the computer, keeping up on the latest development in childcare and diseases, and e-mailing the information to colleagues and friends. The wall of his study is decorated with the pictures of his young patients that have been given to him by grateful parents over the years. Though his condition may have slightly slowed the speech of what was always a very soft spoken gentleman, his mind is as sharp as ever, and turned to this latest health problem that is threatening the life and future of the next generation.

NEWS: At what point in your medical education did you decide you wanted to be a pediatrician, and what was your motivation?

Dr. B: The kids. A kid comes to you when it is sick. It doesn't say to you "I don't feel like working." There are no ulterior motives, they only come to you when they are sick, and that is what attracted me; the honesty of the children. Grown people have too many agendas when they come to you, they are not really straightforward. They were always looking to gain something, and that rather turned me off. Even if a child can't talk, you can see their suffering, and you can do something about it. You can't do much about a young, healthy strong man coming and saying "Doctor, I want to get the week off."

NEWS: Did you experience this behavior during your internship?

Dr. B: Yes, while I served as an intern and then resident at the Brooklyn Hospital, and though people may associate this behavior with Arubans going AO, it is evident everywhere.

NEWS: You have never regretted that decision to be a pediatrician?

Dr. B: No, it is the most wonderful experience to be working with children. It is very satisfying as a pediatrician to be there at the bedside when a child is born. Performing the necessary ablations that will insure a babies survival, it is so very important. If one does not do something and the baby is born in blood or amniotic fluid, the child will suffocate, so it is very important to be there and know what to do.

NEWS: So you have had the situations where your intervention made a difference; how often?

Dr. B: It is actually quite frequent that the child needs to be assisted in breathing easier. Often the nurses perform this function, and the pediatrician is only there when possible complications are expected, such as during a cesarean section or a difficult birth, or called in when the unexpected happen. Then the pediatrician is present to perform the vital function of helping the child to breath easier after birth.

NEWS: Have you an idea of the mortality rate of children in Aruba?

Dr. B. I do not have exact figures, but it is quite low. I would say it is low because nearly 95% of the expectant mothers have excellent prenatal care by the midwife, the house physician, or a gynecologist. This makes surprises at birth with complications low, once in a while you get someone that has never been to the doctor, but it is rare. The White-Yellow Cross and the midwives work within a very small community that can be well monitored.

NEWS: What has been for you some of the greatest rewards for you effort?

Dr. B. I am truly touched by seeing one of my first patients, who came to me at the age of two years old with leukemia recently graduate from law school here on Aruba and her family invited me to the

ceremony. That was very wonderful for me to see this child that had been so terribly ill become a successful citizen.

I had one family where the grandmother began with me as a patient when she was ten years old, I attended her daughter, and then the child in turn, so that was three generations of one family that were my patients. I have about five or six families like that, and it is very rewarding to see; you can't imagine the satisfaction.

Dr. M.L. van der Griendt-Okijk, acting administrator recalls Dr. Bryson's devotion to his patients during his years of practice. According to her, he was the first native-born pediatrician on Aruba, previously they had all been from Holland. "Dr Bryson was part of that early group of young Aruban medical pioneers, going off to the U.S. and other countries to obtain their medical degrees and returning to practice on the island. What is remarkable about him is the way he would treat the nurses, he was always very polite, always respectful to everyone, no matter what their station. The patients and the parents loved him; he was always available when he was needed. I worked along side him quite often as an anesthesiologist, and so had the opportunity to observe him, and he was wonderful with the children; the way he treated all his patients was something special."

Dr. Bryson feels truly honored by Saturday's seminar organized in his name; in his opinion an effort to help the children of the community serves his memory best. He was present at the press conference announcing the coming symposium and expressed his concerns over the growing problem of child obesity and its consequences. He is very well satisfied that such an event will take place, and a number of colleagues and friends have come to speak, particularly because of his influence. For Dr. Bryson, it would be rewarding to see his past patients attend the conference and look to the health of their children, and seek understanding of what has now become a major health concern.